

Interview with  
Aurelio Bandera Gomez,  
Contract Laborer,  
San Antonio Farm Labor Association,  
Ontario, California,  
September 23, 1957

Q: Where is your home in Mexico?

A: In Huitsuco, Guerrero. Huitsuco is about 20 or 25 miles from Taxco. It is a town of about 6,000 persons.

Q: How old are you?

A: Forty seven.

Q: Are you married? Do you have children?

A: Yes, I am married, and I have six children.

Q: Have you ever been to the United States before?

A: Yes. I have had two previous contracts as a bracero. This was a long time ago, during the war. I worked around Redrock, Arizona, and around Tucson, Arizona. The work we were doing at that time was railroad maintenance work.

Q: How long have you been in the United States under your present contract?

A: About eight months.

Q: Do you have friends in your home town in Mexico who have been to the United States?

A: Yes. Ten or fifteen of them.

Q: What is your work in Mexico?

A: Trabajo en agricultura (I work in agriculture). I am also a hierbero (herb doctor).

Q: How much of the time do you work as a hierbero?

A: Oh, very little, actually.

Q: How long have you been a hierbero?

A: About five years.

Q: How did you become one?

A: An uncle of mine who is now dead taught me all I know about herbs. He used libros de medicina (medical books) to teach me, but he never allowed me to look through the books. In fact, he did not even allow me to see the titles of the books. This uncle of mine was a hierbero himself, and had performed many wonderful cures. He also taught me how to castrate animals, and how to care for them afterwards.

Q: How long did you study with your uncle?

A: About a year.



Q: Are there any certain types of illness which you specialize in curing?

A: Todo es muy sencillo (all is very simple). Colds, fevers, sprains, headaches, whatever you have in the way of illness, I will cure you. By the way, you look thin to me. I can tell you of an herb which will cause you to gain weight.

Q: Could you tell me of some of the things which you use to cure people?

A: Well, for example, a very good cure for headaches is to smoke oregano (marjoram). You can either make a little pile of it on the table or some other surface, and light it, and inhale the fumes -- or you can roll it up in the form of a cigarette, with cigarette paper, just the way some people do with marijuana. (Laughter) I have often smoked oregano myself, and so have my friends, and it never fails to cure us.

Q: Could you mention any other remedies you use?

A: For intestinal illnesses and infections, I recommend a bit of tisiquite\* boiled in one liter of water, with two pinches of bicarbonate of soda. This is to be used in the form of an enema. Or, you can use this same procedure, substituting malba\* for tisiquite\*. A very good remedy for colic consists of a few leaves of ruda\* boiled in water and taken orally. For loose teeth the best remedy I know of is tuterque\* -- that is, huamuchil\* leaves which are still bitter. These should be rubbed on the teeth and the gums. There is a very good vaginal douche consisting of capitaneja\* with sal tostada y molida (toasted and ground salt). A good cure for poisoning of all kinds is caldo de frijol negro sin sal (black bean broth without salt).

Q: Would you please describe for me some of the cures you have brought about?

A: Well, my father was once paralyzed. I boiled a purple onion and used the broth as an ointment on his joints. One should be careful when performing this cure and not wash one's hands for eight days after doing it. Otherwise, one may become paralyzed also. This remedy cured my father. Unhappily, after I had cured him, he went to see a médico in order to get an injection. I told him before he went that if he did this, it would kill him. But he went anyway. The same day that he received the injection, he died.

Q: Would you tell me of some of the cures you have done in this country?

A: Four of the men I have cured in this camp all had the same malady: vómitos con flemas (vomiting with phlegm), caused by the food that they serve in this camp. I gave them canela (cinnamon) boiled with sugar and cured every one of them. There was also a friend of mine here who had an aching tendon in his buttock. I cured him with cebo de res (cattle fodder) and alcohol frio (cold alcohol). Another friend, with a sprained ankle, I cured in the same way.

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\* So far as the editor is aware, these Mexican herbs have no exact counterpart in United States terms.



Q: Approximately how many men have you cured since you have been in this camp?

A: Only about five or six.

Q: Do men come to you from all over the camp or just from your own barracks?

A: Nada mas mis amigos (my friends, nothing more).

Q: Do you feel there are certain types of illnesses which should be taken to other types of healers, such as doctors, curanderas, or brujas?

A: No, señor. Ni las curanderas ni los doctores saben nada (No, sir. Neither curanderas nor doctors know anything). And brujas are pure superstition. However, if you should happen to be embrujado (bewitched), I can tell you what you should do. If you wear a small bag of mustard seed around your neck, and if you take some aceite de comer con una naranja en ayunas el día viernes en la mañana (olive oil with an orange, before breakfast on Friday morning), the brujas will not bother you any more. I guarantee it.

Q: Do most of your patients come to you after going to a doctor and failing to get relief, or do most of them come to you first?

A: Four of the men here in the camp came to me first. One of them went to the doctor first, and when the doctor wasn't able to cure him, he came to me for help.

Q: Have you ever had any dealings with the camp doctor?

A: I have never been sick, but if I got sick I would cure myself. El doctor no conoce nada (the doctor does not comprehend anything). The only thing he knows how to do is to give pills, and on top of everything else, after he treats the men, he tells them they may take a bath right away. This is the worst thing he could tell them.

Q: Does the camp management know of your work among the men here?

A: I do not know if Sr. Rosenberger\* knows of that which I am doing. Sr. Magaña\*\* came around one afternoon while I was curing one of my friends, and he said what I was doing was very good.

Q: Do you use the same types of herbs here as you do in Mexico, or are you forced to use substitutes?

A: In this country there are none of the herbs that I am accustomed to using in Mexico. But I do not use substitutes. Everything that I want, I send for. My family send me the herbs inside of an envelope, along with the letters they send me.

Q: Do the men here seem to suffer from the same sorts of ailments as in Mexico, or are there certain conditions which are more common here?

A: Son las mismas enfermedades aquí como en México (there are the same sicknesses here as in Mexico).

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\* The camp manager.

\*\* The mayordomo (assistant camp manager).



Q: Is there anything you have learned in this country which you think might be useful to you in your curing work in Mexico?

A: Here they understand nothing, and consequently there is nothing for me to learn or be interested in.

Q: Do you charge anything for your services?

A: Entre amigos nunca cobro -- ni en México ni aquí (among friends, I charge nothing -- neither in Mexico nor here). For the most part, the only people I cure are either relatives of mine in Mexico, or else close friends of mine. It is not too often that I am called upon to cure somebody who is a complete stranger to me. In case I am called upon to cure a stranger, I do not charge a specific fee, but I do accept a propina (tip) if the patient is willing to give me one.

Q: Do you have any particular plans for the future, as far as curing is concerned? For example, have you ever considered making it your full-time profession?

A: No. This has never been my full-time work and never will be. I only cure my family and my friends here and in Mexico. When I return to Mexico, I will return to the same farm work I was doing before I came to this country.